



## Conference looks at coastline

"Public access and economic development do not have to be at war," keynote speaker Ann Breen tells state officials and preservationists.

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CRANSTON -- Everyone knows that Rhode Island owes its greatest moments to its miles of waterfront. And it's a popular refrain that the state's future is tied directly to what it does with its shores.

But what of its present? Where does the state stand now in how it uses its coastline and how can it get to that promised future?

Yesterday, municipal and state officials met with experts and interested citizens at one of the state's most-treasured pieces of waterfront, Pawtuxet Village, to mull over that question. The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission held its annual conference, with this year's focus on "Outlooks and opportunities on the waterfront."

Among 25 presentations, panels and tours through the day, a common theme was sounded: around the state, the waterfront is being rediscovered and utilized after years of neglect, but it will take the joint efforts of government, preservationists and developers to create areas that are environmentally sound, commercially viable and socially vibrant.

"Public access and economic development do not have to be at war," said the keynote speaker, Ann Breen, codirector of The Waterfront Center, a nonprofit urban planning organization based in Washington, D.C.

Providence, many speakers said, is the archetype. It has already done a good job of opening access to its riverfront, but now, with the relocation of Route 195, the city has the opportunity for its coastline on Narragansett Bay to experience a rebirth.

But there is only so much that a city can do alone. The various cities must also work together under the umbrella of state and private groups to achieve something greater, said Jack Gold, director of the Providence Preservation Society.

"It is amazing to me how disconnected Providence is to East Providence" when it comes to waterfront cohesion, Gold said. "How do we take advantage of the opportunities there?"

Even as the state refashions the coastline, and removes industrial uses in favor of commercial and residential, it must realize that every action dramatically affects the environment, said Barry A. Costa-Pierce, director of Rhode Island Sea Grant.

"We can never go back to 1491. Our challenge is to go forward in partnership and envision our coastal future," he said.

While in the past, large industrial plants were the biggest polluters in the area, development in Rhode Island has proceeded to such a point that single-family houses are the biggest source of pollutants in the Narragansett Bay watershed, Costa-Pierce said. Now, septic systems in homes near the coast are polluting the waters more than large factories.

The conference was attended by more than 500 people. The day also featured tours of the Pawtuxet area.

The Heritage Commission also handed out its annual awards. Preserve Rhode Island and the Providence Preservation Society received Antoinette F. Downing awards and Cornish Associates and Julia Lewis Morris received the Fredrick C. Williamson awards, both of which recognize individual commitments to historic preservation.

The Pawtuxet Village Association received the award for advocacy, and the Moses Taft House in Burrillville received the award for stewardship. The Daniel Angell Tavern in Glocester, Bridgeton Elementary School in Burrillville, the Newport Art Museum and the Edith Thornton Conant House in Central Falls were all recognized with awards for preservation projects. The Heritage Commission also recognized the numerous recent rehabilitations of mills around the state.